

ETHANOL UPDATE: HOW TO PROTECT YOUR BOAT

MOTOR
BOATING
Since 1907

MotorBoating

HEADING OFFSHORE

> WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO



PRIZE-WINNING DESIGN

CW HOOD 43 (ON THE COVER)

CRUISING ADVENTURES

- > FORT LAUDERDALE TO THE ABACOS
- > LAKE HURON'S NORTH CHANNEL

NEW ELECTRONICS

WHAT'S HOT RIGHT NOW

CAUGHT IN THE FOG?

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE



- > GRADY-WHITE 36
- > VIKING 46
- > CORVETTE 32
- > BUZZARDS BAY 34

motorboating.com

JANUARY 2010 US \$4.99





Journey Home

Sprague Theobald earned cruising fame when he and his crew made it through the Northwest Passage, yet he's surprised by what he really learned in the process.

BY SPRAGUE THEOBALD

Recently, Dan Streech of Nordhavn introduced me as a featured speaker at the company's southwest rendezvous in Dana Point, California. As I took the stage and faced the 200 guests, I found I had nothing insightful to say, despite the fact that I spent the previous five months getting to and through the Northwest Passage on my Nordhavn 57, *Bagan*.

Yes, my crew and I completed the Passage and, when we finished our journey, we had traveled approximately 8,500 miles. And yes, the trip took a lot of time, during which we saw and heard things that very few people have ever had the rare privilege of encountering. Yet standing before this eager audience, I realized that while I understood the past five months intellectually, on an emotional level, the scope of what the crew aboard *Bagan* accomplished simply had not caught up with me. I allowed as much and told the crowd I wasn't too sure of exactly what to say, although I did my best to fill them in on what our experience aboard

FAR NORTH.
Bagan at rest in Blaney Bay (above); a whale plays in Disko Bay (right).



Bagan was like and to answer their questions as succinctly as possible. I even seem to remember getting a laugh or two.

Now, as I write this article, which is meant to be a wrap-up of my experiences through the Passage, I find I'm in the same situation as I was in Dana Point. When I look at the charts, pictures and videos of the trip, I realize that while we were indeed there, it may take months or even years for me to understand the size and

scope of this accomplishment and to really come to terms with it. Yet I do know this: When I look back at the past 150 days, and think about the events that occurred during our journey, there is one thing that, in many ways, is more powerful than some of the most dramatic moments of the trip — these include the sight of the graves of the crew from the lost Franklin Expedition on Beechey Island, Canada, and the feeling I had when we were trapped in the arctic ice for two gut-wrenching days. As extraordinary and otherworldly as those events were, they all but pale when compared to the experience I had watching the crew gather, meld and grow as a unit and then succeed in our goal.

For five months, I was able to witness life and all its complications and challenges unfold before me. During the journey, each crew member was presented with demanding tests at a time when he was far from home and help. I was able to see, and I hope be a part of, each individual's growth and strength in the face of unimagined challenges and adversities. As much as I treasure the memory of watching hundreds of beluga whales ghosting into Beechey Bay as it was lit by a midnight sun, it was equally as rare a treat to see the coping skills of *Bagan's* small crew put to the test. Looking back at the miles we traveled together, I can now see how we came to rely on one another, how we tried to be honest and forthright with our fears and joys and how we tried to support each other in times of weakness.

Yet our time together wasn't always pleasurable. In one case I watched sadly as a crew member failed to meet the challenges and fell, not able to finish the trip or honor the commitment. Yet even in this failure we found a gift, for the



SNAPSHOTS. From left: Chauncey and Dominique Tanton and Sprague Theobald in Beechey Bay (top); Greg Deascentis on watch (middle); ice in the Northwest Passage (bottom).

adversity of being "one less" gave the remaining crew the strength and resolve to meet what, at that time, lay only hours ahead: the Bering Sea. We started out as a determined and talented crew that had come together; we became a group that is as tightly knit as one could hope for. I don't hesitate to use the word "family," for that is what we've truly become — figuratively and literally. Three members of the crew are actually family — Chauncey Tanton, my stepson; Dominique Tanton, my stepdaughter; and Sefton Theobald, my son. Though I hadn't had the luxury of being together under the same roof with them for the past 15 years, we became closer on this trip. The things we experienced did more to define the word and concept of family than anything else I've ever known. (Greg Deascentis, the other member of the crew, had the unenviable task of stepping into this budding family unit as a stranger to all but me. Greg very quickly became a supportive and working member of our family/crew, never missing a watch. Usually he was the first person taking film footage above and under the water.)

Time and again I was able to watch these grown "children" shed their mantels as young adults and step into those of wise and courageous individuals. As the one who headed this project, I simply could not be more proud of how this team became a crew that is second to none. Our journey to and through the Northwest Passage was not always an easy one, yet as a parent and stepparent, I know what I was a part of was as magical and meaningful a gift as any parent could hope for. Chauncey, Dominique, Sefton and Greg, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your gift to me of your trust, enthusiasm and energy. I am truly blessed. ♦